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ABSTRACT

The realities of the changing economy include social as well as political polarization of socio-economically diverse groups. The roles and issues of disadvantaged persons in the work place and in national economic schemes are the subject of growing interest among economic planners, politicians, educators, and human resource development professionals. This paper was written to raise an informed awareness regarding disadvantaged workers. It presents a series of discussions of several socio-economic aspects of the emerging and existing disadvantaged worker. The discussions present a summary of the current and emerging critical elements of each topic and suggest foci and possible response tactics. The topics discussed include: (1) concern and bias; (2) transition to work; (3) phases in adjustment to work; (4) restrictions on choosing and deciding; (5) influences of life education, and other unstructured experiences; and (6) dropouts. The paper concludes that the disadvantaged worker group is increasingly becoming the available supply in the supply side economies of human capital and that dealing effectively with the disadvantaged is an issue of developing skills and compatibility, and not enforcing conformity. (NB)

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ONE STRIKE . . . TWO STRIKES . . . BUT THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE OUT!

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INTRODUCTION

The future of any country is dependent on the will and wisdom of its citizens. Whenever its citizens are not educated or trained to the fullest extent of their capacity, the potential of that country is greatly curtailed.

The roles and issues of disadvantaged in the work place and in national economic schemes are the subject of growing interest among economic planners, politicians, educators, and human resource development professionals. This is as much of a concern in rural areas as it is in urban areas which are the terminal points of much of the recent migration phenomena.

The purpose of this paper is to raise an informed awareness regarding disadvantaged workers. This will be accomplished through discussions of several socio-economic aspects of the emerging and existing disadvantaged worker. These discussions will present a summary of the current and emerging critical elements of each issue and suggest foci and possible response tactics. The topics that will be discussed are: concern and bias, transition to work, phases in adjustment to work, restrictions on choosing and deciding, influences of life-education and other unstructured experiences, and dropouts. This message is presented as much as a reaffirmation of our knowledge as it is an insight for the uninitiated.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

To avoid redundancy and the consumption of text for constant clarification, the terms "we" and "client" will be used as a literary convenience. Throughout the paper, the encompassing term "we" will be used as reference to us as individuals and counselors, organizations in the marketplace, as well as social and governmental institutions. The term "client" will be used throughout the text to refer to individuals or groups which can be classified as disadvantaged. Discussion of the term or concept of "disadvantaged" has its own place in the text.

CONCERN AND BIAS

Our concern for the qualities of exceptional human beings arises out of a concern for the qualities of all human beings. As our regard for the potential development of all human beings rises, we become more conscious of the needs of the afflicted and disadvantaged among us. The idea of systematically focusing learning experiences and counseling activities for the disadvantaged is a major educational and social task and one which is critical to economic survival of that social group. Dealing with disadvantaged, however, should be an issue of developing skills and compatibility, not enforcing conformity. Yet, as organizations and educational institutions look to these individuals as the emerging dominant pool of available workers, the traditional orientation is still one of "what can we do to make them more like us". Rather, we must change our orientation to "how do we accommodate the differences in a positive contributing way".

The abundant literature available on the disadvantaged (also referred to as: culturally deprived, alienated, and members of the culture of poverty; educationally unappreciated, survivors of adversity, culturally different, lower socio-economic, lower class, etc.) suggests that, in the immediate future, an exponentially increasing percentage of available work force entrants will hold this classification (Gowan, 1966; Ferman, 1967; Rao, Richmond, Zubrzqcki, 1984). Some educators and human resource development professionals have embraced the challenge this presents. Nevertheless, it can be argued that equal educational and training opportunities for these groups does not necessarily mean the same kind of education or training opportunities. In most cases it means "equal plus" more of the same in greater depth, quality and appropriateness. If, for example, an individual is from a social environment which emphasizes unqualified obedience to authority, they may have difficulty with training which prepares them for independent or consensus decision making. Therefore, they will require additional efforts to acquire appropriate skills and

knowledge which allow them to contribute in positive ways to their employers and society without having to change closely held cultural or ethnic values (Herr, 1984; Ornstein & Sharma, 1983).

When dealing with the disadvantaged, it is important that we are aware of our own biases. If we see a client as inadequate, below average, socially different, or motivated by factors other than ones we value, we tend to stereotype (even if slightly) their strengths, weaknesses, and potential. Cognitively, we recognize a need and honorable place for carpenters, clerks, truck drivers, and labourers. Yet, by facilitating an increase of unrealistic client expectations, based on our biases of what should be normative behavior and attributes, we may reenforce the feelings of failure realized when individuals or groups fail to achieve what we feel they should. Our over-optimism may be as damaging as negative biases. Therefore, the challenge to us must be to determine "optimistic realities" and set programmeme goals and standards around these.

TRANSITION TO WORK

A recent proliferation of human resource development (HRD) psychosocial and career development research has added insight into issues associated with the transition to the world of work and to work adjustment by the disadvantaged. The results of several studies suggest that a sequence of adjustment in five aspects of jobs enables individuals to successfully adapt to work (Burke, 1982; DuBrin, 1984). These aspects include: performance aspects, organizational aspects, interpersonal aspects, responsibility aspects, and affective aspects. In total, these aspects encompass the thwarting conditions that emerging and disadvantaged workers may experience as they attempt to become established in a job.

There appear to be two classes of thwarting conditions. The first includes those issues dealing with job performance (e.g. work habits, peer and supervisory adjustment, communications, new role identity, responsibility, maturity, attitudes, and values). The

second includes those issues related to job entry, career planning, and management problems (e.g. interview and test-taking, education preparation, job management, job-seeking, and prejudice and discrimination) (Herr, 1984; Ornstein, 1982).

It is useful to reaffirm that the transitions and adjustments to work and between jobs or occupations are not single events but dynamic ones likely to recur throughout the life of the client. Clearly, the emerging transitional nature of work and employment is inconsistent with the experience of the traditional mature work force. The demise of existing role models of a single career, occupation, or jobs in a minimum number of enterprises throughout the work life of an individual is contributing to an emotional and psychologically confusing set of barriers for clients who may already be experiencing traumatic social transitions.

The spur to the increased amount of career change in our society lies in the transition in the base of our economy and accompanying changes in technology and processes. The result is that our clients need to move into new jobs, adapt to changes in the job, and accept advances in careers which may not be at their own initiative. Associated with these changes is the need to acquire new knowledge and training in how to use existing knowledge in different ways. An associated phenomenon to the rapid change in the nature of work is our trend to replace experience with knowledge as the criteria for selection, retention, and measurement of success (Jenkins, 1988).

One imperative is to reinforce to clients and ourselves that strategic job change should not be accompanied by the traditional stigma that job change is due to job performance failure. This is especially true when the need for job change is precipitated by shifts in technology or organization economics.

PHASES IN THE ADJUSTMENT TO WORK

As counselors, we think of work adjustment phases as being pre-transitional, transitional, and post-transitional. The pre-

transitional phase involves training and educational decisions concerning occupation and career. It is during this phase that the meaning of work and what it means to be a productive worker are considered.

The transitional phase interfaces with one's eventual actual work adjustment. Partial disengagement from school occurs during this phase. This may occur in the form of part-time after-school work, participation in structured school/work cooperative programmemes, or internships and apprenticeships. It is also characterized by a search for work activities which include interview processes and first-hand contact with work sites of interest or possibility.

The post-transitional phase occurs during the entry and initial post-entry period into the work site. It is focused upon the actual adjustment to the work done and the work place entered. This may include the identification, evaluation, and adjustment to organization and/or work group culture and norms. Experiences during this phase challenge or corroborate the decisions made in both the pre-transitional and transitional stages (Herr, 1984; Ferman, 1967).

For disadvantaged workers, transition to work and work adjustment are multi-dimensional problems. Often these individuals are provided job training, occupational information, encouragement, and/or career counseling. When they still do not get work or adjust to it, we may make several assumptions. We may assume they are lazy, do not really want to work, and/or that they prefer welfare. Rather, it may be that we only provided help in one of the dimensions of life affecting their transition to and effective induction into work. These dimensions could include such realities as child care, health, transportation, social and interpersonal conflicts, financial or legal problems, emotional problems, drug and alcohol abuse problems, job qualifications, discrimination, and language and communications problems (Castles & Kosak, 1985). Suffice it to say, the matrix of issues for any individual or

client group will be unique to that client at that point in time. Therefore, when organizations or economic planners engage in planned change which will involve or affect disadvantaged worker elements of human capital, there is a need for counseling professionals to respond to the planned change in two ways.

First, they must assume the role of analyzing and communicating to planners two critical things. Planners need to be informed of the immediate impact of the planned change and what the longer-term issues will be for disadvantaged or less mature workers as a result of this change. Second, counselors must contextualize their multi-dimensional view of the disadvantaged individual or client work group(s) to the economic, social, and organizational realities in the client's environment. By taking a multi-dimensional view of the clients' problems with work, a differential treatment approach may be evolved to resolve these various problems. (Herr, 1984; Ornstein, 1982).

CHOOSING AND DECIDING

The sophistication and organization of contemporary work frequently walls off disadvantaged from the jobs they might choose and the information about the availability of work. Many counselors and teachers suffer from the same lack of knowledge. In some cases, young men and women find what they studied in school to be unrelated to available jobs and new processes, materials, and technological advances (Rao, Richmond, Zubrzycki, 1984). In addition, economic and political planners in Canada are beginning to realize the incredible complexity and intense challenge of the technological and human resource development problems facing us in the immediate and foreseeable future. Indeed, it is already evident that many of the problems experienced by our work force are not simply technical, but are psychological and social as well. This phenomenon causes us to reflect that choice issues may be as much a function of employability as availability of employment.

Herr and Long (1983), as well as Richmond and Zubrzycki (1984), view employability as related to one's potential for adjusting to, and being productive in, the work place and job. To be "employable" means that one is conceptually, psychologically, and occupationally prepared to perform in the work place. "Employability" can be further defined as a composite set of traits and skills which permits the individual to meet the demands of the work place. These include skills which apply to a variety of work environments and jobs. General elements include issues of responsibility, maturity, attitudes and values, work habits, adjustments to peers and supervisors, communications, taking on new values, self image, and coping with automation and new technology. Specific elements include those skills which deal with the ability to perform specific tasks required in a particular job in a specific setting. The individual is capable of being in the work place. Alternately, Herr and Long define "employed" as meaning that one holds a job wherein employability skills are utilized and demonstrated to their fullest. The individual is in the work place.

The idea of general employability skills having high importance but infrequent application is not valid. Under our historic economic model, entry into the work force meant a reasonably confirmed life commitment to a particular job or organization. This model was driven by stable, slowing evolving technology, and a stable marketplace for organizations which contained homogeneous work groups.

Today's economy is characterized by highly changing and evolving technology which requires workers with new or evolving skills and unstable markets within which organizations frequently change product lines or market strategies. This model reflects a heterogenous work group containing both ethnic and demographic diversity.

Regardless of the meaning of work to an individual, that meaning is ultimately conveyed through decision making. Decision

making is the process by which an individual articulates knowledge and attitudes into a plan of action. The plan, however, will reflect the limit of scope of the accuracy and extent of information available to the decision maker.

Implicit is that the information helps to delineate realistic opportunities as well as the risk system surrounding the opportunities. Risk taking postures differ with individuals. They range from the tentative and cautious to the bold and adventuresome. Individuals need to be counseled and prepared to deal with these extreme, and potentially troublesome, behaviors when they occur in relation to occupation and career decision making. In addition, they should also be helped to view decision making as a process which can be learned and which can be fueled by accurate information.

Many young people, and indeed adults, vary considerably in understanding their own decision making process and how they use it to make career and/or job related choices. Herr (1984), Jenkins (1988), and Ferman (1967) suggest that career decision making patterns used by most individuals fall into three categories.

In the first category, individuals seeks little career information, consider only a few occupational alternatives, and have only a limited rationale for not considering advanced education or training actions. Individuals tend to focus on current plans and activities as being career-long.

In the second category, individuals select and rationalize alternate occupations and advanced education or training activities. This rationalization includes an examination of anticipated outcomes of each acceptable alternative under consideration.

In the final category, individuals do not gather career information, fail to attempt to follow through on poorly formulated plans, and fail to formulate strong rationales for considering low level occupational alternatives. As a result of following one of these patterns, individuals arrive at career decisions which can

best be described in terms of their focus. For example, is the decision related to an attempt to find a job, long- or short-term, full- or part-time, or primarily to earn personal income? Or, does the decision reflect concern about preparation for work, ambivalence about choice of a curriculum, a type of proprietary school, or a college major? Does the decision focus on clarifying and acting upon an intermediate step toward long-range aspirations? Is the work under consideration being chosen for reasons broader than income alone (Herr & Long, 1983)?

Herr (1984) cites research by Pitz and Harren which suggests that a person will seek information only if the perceived payoff is greater than the cost of obtaiing the information. Herr cites the example of the impulsive decision maker who wants to terminate the decision process as quickly as possible and who makes a decision with a minimum of information. An agonizing decision maker, on the other hand, may continually seek information to avoid the act of commitment to a particular choice and its attendant course of action.

One emerging factor in young adult workers' career decision making is that the counseling programmes in schools are not a primary source used to support career decisions. In addition, disadvantaged individuals tend to make decisions based on informal rather than formal sources. Parents and relatives, friends, and employed workers rank one, two and three as persons young workers talk with about occupations prior to entering the job market. Counselors and teachers lag far behind. This suggests that the source reference points for career or occupation decision making are those which are intimately involved with some micro aspect of the world of work rather than those sources with a more broad and objectively based view of world of work issues (Gowan, 1966; Ornstein, 1982).

LIFE, EDUCATION AND OTHER UNSTRUCTURED EXPERIENCES

The most severe effect of a historically disadvantaged environment occurs in the early years of job seeking and occupational experimentation (Jenkins, 1988; Ornstein & Sharma, 1983). In this case, the adversity is defined as social, cultural, educational, or other such factors which negatively impact on an individual's ability to compete. If a young worker has only minimally learned basic job skills, he/she experiences difficulty in competing, advancing, and making up deficient skills. If an individual is a minority or an immigrant from another culture, he/she may have difficulty overcoming biases inherent in the normative make-up of the decision makers or difficulty assimilating into the worker group.

Some researchers suggest that conditions of life for disadvantaged tend to minimize opportunities to manipulate objects or to experiment with them in an orderly manner. The disadvantaged, therefore, tend not to develop skills which allow them to easily develop abstract concepts about relationships (cause and effect) which support higher cognitive creativity. The world of the disadvantaged is a world of simple relationships characterized by rapid shifts from one activity to another, limited attention to one thing, and relationships with authority figures which allocate specific chores to be accomplished and punishments to be meted out. With these biases, experiences, and disadvantages, this worker group is the growing nucleus upon which (business and industry? nations?) must build productivity and economic stability.

As the need for more skilled and advanced technical workers increases, organizations are forced to draw from that pool of individuals who are considered to be the "bottom of the pile". The more able, adjusted, and motivated (the upper thirty percent of the work force) are overly burdened with the need for greater and greater productivity and performance to meet the goals of the enterprise. Conversely, the bottom of the pile is characterized

by less success with formal education, less motivation to seek out additional training or work preparation, and/or hostility to efforts to be further educated and trained. It is this group that is becoming the "supply" in the supply side of human capital and economics. It is this supply from which individual organizations and regional and large scale economies must draw and invest in order to achieve growth (Geroy, 1987; Bell, 1976).

Many of these individuals are migrants from a variety of backgrounds recently arrived in industrial centers. They come from rural areas of our own nation and from other countries. For many of these individuals, it is a transition from the eighteenth to the twentieth century in one generation. This transition involves a difficult adaptation. It represents not only a shift from a simpler culture into a more complex one, but also into a society which is mechanized, anonymous, and alienating. In addition, these individuals are restricted to an environment which may limit their opportunities to learn about the larger culture in which they exist. These environments frequently accentuate the lower socio-economic lifestyle and encourage "freedom born of anonymity which permits license without teaching limits or controls". Frequently, it is this experience which provides individuals with a set of reference points, norms of behavior, biases, and the associated attitudes which they extrapolate as reflective and acceptable to the larger social and economic structure (Castles, 1985; Jenkins, 1988).

These issues are not unique to immigrants traversing political boundaries. Indeed, they are reflected in migrants from one socio-economic group to another or individuals involved in upward mobile situations in organizations or communities. In organizations and schools alike, the issues are the same. There is a need to deal with the greater heterogeneity and increasing social distance between organization and/or school culture and that of the home or neighborhood.

An interesting point to be made is that many migrants and immigrants are from lower socio-economic groups within our own society or from other sending societies. Frequently, the parents of these individuals simply have not been able to provide the scope, richness, or type of experiences which provide the basis and framework, outlooks, initial grounding, and readiness for formal learning that middle and upper class upbringing has as a matter of course. And, historically, our educational and social systems have been almost exclusively geared to the mores of the latter group (Richmond & Zubrzyki, 1984; Ornstein, 1982).

DROPOUTS

Much of the circumstance surrounding the evolution of a disadvantaged individual is just that - circumstance. However, the potential school dropout presents a unique opportunity to intervene in one circumstance associated with disadvantaged emerging young workers.

Much of the research related to the dropout problem consists of surveys concerning how dropouts are getting along in the world as compared to their counterparts who obtained high school or advanced education. The counselor interested in this problem is best suited to deal with it when cognizant of the magnitude of the dropout rate and the characteristics of the potential dropouts which differentiate them from potential graduates. With this information, a counselor is better able to develop focused progammes to meet the unique needs of the client group they serve.

The process for effectively dealing with potential dropouts consists of two activities. The first activity is the determination of the dropout rate for the targeted population.

Once this data has been amassed, it is possible to develop a dropout characteristic profile for the group under study. This can be structured by looking at such data as: age, days absent, parent occupations, rank in class or some other measure of scholarship, ethnic or cultural background, teacher ratings of citizenship

and/or effort, scores on standardized reading tests, participation in extra curricular activities, etc.

The second activity focuses on a formalized programmeme to deal with the high risk members of the group under study. Be cautioned that generic off-the-shelf programmemes probably will not succeed. The focus of the programmes is the high-side group members and the issues which cause them to opt to drop out. Our role as facilitator is to synthesize, clarify, and provide non-judgmental feedback to help elucidate consensus of feelings and attitudes being evolved or expressed by the participants. These expressions become the focus for negotiation of behavior modifications and expectations and self-determined corrective courses of action.

SUMMARY

The realities of the changing economy are more than trade balance, gross national product, or per capita income statistics. They includes social as well as political polarization of socio-economically diverse groups.

This paper has discussed several aspects of one of these groups - the disadvantaged. We have seen that we frequently subject this group to extremes of negative bias and over optimistic expectations. We see that job changing (traditionally a signal of work performance problems for this group) should be viewed with an understanding of economic and organization realities. We see a need to assume a multi-dimensional approach to analyzing issues associated with the disadvantaged. We see that there are defined decision making patterns of behavior which may be adopted by this special group. We see that the utility of having practical and practiced employability skills will enhance individual opportunities for successful job transfer and/or advancement. We see that the disadvantaged worker group is increasingly becoming the available supply in the supply side economies of human capital.

Finally, we see that opportunities do exist to deal with the "at risk" emerging worker through drop out interventions.

However, throughout the preceding discussions, one theme is a constant. That theme is, that dealing effectively with disadvantaged is an issue of developing skills and compatibility, and not enforcing conformity.

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